

PEOPLE³²

In 1800, before Lewis and Clark traveled past Nebraska, several Native American tribes, mainly the Pawnee, Ponca, Omaha, Oto, Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho, lived in the area. The largest and most powerful tribe, the Pawnee, had about 6,000 members. In 1913, only 4,784 Indians of all tribes remained in Nebraska because others were moved to reservations in other states. About 16,100 Native Americans live in Nebraska today, with about 35 percent residing on the state's three reservations — the Santee Sioux, Omaha and Winnebago reservations, all in northeastern Nebraska. These reservations are supervised by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The first Nebraska census in 1854 counted 2,732 residents. At the time, the area was a territory that included parts of present-day North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. The 1870 census, taken after Nebraska achieved statehood in 1867, counted 122,993 people.

In the late 19th century, many European immigrants came to Nebraska seeking free land under the federal Homestead Act of 1862. By 1900, Germans accounted for 15 percent of the state's entire population. Other ethnic groups included the Swedes, Danes, Bohemians, German Russians, Poles, French, Irish, English and Italians. State-wide railroad construction spurred development of the communities where immigrants settled. Following the Civil War, black people migrated to Nebraska, and some of them tried homesteading. Most were lured to urban areas, where chances for finding work were better. The 1880 census showed a total of 2,385 black people living in the state. By 1900 that number had increased to 6,269. Omaha's black population doubled between 1910 and 1920.

Nebraska's Population Today³³

In 2012, the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported 1,855,525 people living in Nebraska, an increase of 8.4 percent since 2000. Nebraska is the 37th most populous state.

Census data from 2011 showed that 65.6 percent of Nebraskans were born in Nebraska. The data also showed that over half of the state's residents live in the three largest counties — Douglas, which includes Omaha, the state's largest city; Lancaster, which includes Lincoln, the state's capital city; and Sarpy, which has a growing suburban population. Douglas County alone contains more than a quarter of the state's population.

Nebraska's population is mostly white. In 2011, 90.1 percent of the state's people were white, compared to 78.1 percent for the entire nation. 2011 census data also showed the main white ethnic groups in Nebraska were German (40.7 percent), Irish (14.5 percent), English (9.4 percent), Czech (5.3 percent), Swedish (4.8 percent), Polish (3.7 percent) and Danish and French (2.7 percent each).

People of Hispanic origin accounted for 9.5 percent of Nebraska's population in 2011 and are the state's fastest growing ethnic group. Hispanics may be of any race.

³²Information for this section compiled from the following sources: Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce; "The Negro in Nebraska," Eldora Francis Hess, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of History, 1932; Nebraska State Historical Society; Nebraska Indian Commission; *The Nebraska Databook*, Nebraska Department of Economic Development; *Omaha World-Herald*.

³³For more detailed population figures for counties and municipalities, see Pages 809 and 814.

Blacks were 4.7 percent of the state's population; Asians, 1.9 percent and American Indians and Alaska Natives, 1.3 percent. In addition, 1.8 percent of the state's population reported two or more races.

The median age of Nebraskans in 2011 was 36.2 years. People younger than 18 made up 25.1 percent of the state's population, while people 65 and older accounted for 13.5 percent of the population. The state's population was 50.4 percent female and 49.6 percent male.

Nebraska's 10 largest cities, according to the 2011 population estimates, are:

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|--------------------|---------|--------------------|--------|
| Omaha | 415,068 | Fremont | 26,456 |
| Lincoln | 262,341 | Hastings | 24,788 |
| Bellevue | 51,319 | North Platte | 24,634 |
| Grand Island | 49,239 | Norfolk | 24,248 |
| Kearney..... | 31,174 | Columbus | 22,381 |

Trends in Nebraska's Population



Downtown Omaha

Since Nebraska became a state, its total population has grown steadily, with the 2012 population higher than in any previous census. The only decade in which Nebraska lost population was 1930 to 1940, when the Great Depression and drought created economic hardships.

In 1870, most of Nebraska's population was rural. However, urban living has become the norm. In 2000, about two-thirds of Nebraska residents lived in urban areas, defined as municipalities of 2,500 or more residents. While rural populations dwindle, Nebraska's larger cities continue to grow. Between 1990 and 2000, Omaha's population increased 16.2 percent, Lincoln's increased 17.5 percent and Bellevue's increased 43.5 percent.

Nebraska's population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The

most significant growth has occurred in the Hispanic population, which is now the state's largest minority group. In the 1990s, the state's Hispanic population increased from 2.3 percent to 5.5 percent. The black, Asian and American Indian populations also grew 0.8 percent during that time.

The state's population also is getting older. Nebraska's median age increased from 28.6 in 1970 to 36.2 in 2010. About 13.6 percent of Nebraskans were 65 years of age or older in 2000, down slightly from 14.1 percent in 1990, but higher than the 1970 and 1980 totals.